

The Faction That Fools the World

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This August, the leafy parks of Charlotte Square were once again heaving with the boozy intrigue of the Edinburgh International Book Festival. In the last two years, Director Catherine Lockerbie has opened the festival doors in an attempt to cast aside its image as a precious zone for people in the 'book-biz' and quill-pickers with too much time on their hands.

On 19th August the mood changed, as the *Institute of Ideas* kicked off one of its Festival slots. 'The Right to be Offensive' was one in a string of its sessions, at £8.00 a pop it was billed as:

"A lively and challenging debate on creativity, freedom, and the law. This year has seen plays stopped by outraged religious protestors and increasing calls for censorship of material deemed offensive. Are we creating a new kind of thought crime? What does this mean for art and free speech? Come and discuss with Richard Holloway, Tim Parks, Dolan Cummings and associate director of the National Theatre, Tom Morris — responsible for Jerry Springer: The Opera."¹

As the tickets sold-out to the *class de bavardage*, a less frivolous note emerged. This was about the *right being offensive* not the *right to free speech*. This was a stage-managed event, but not one managed by the Book Festival.

The LM Network

The chair of 'The Right to be Offensive' was the Director of the Institute of Ideas, one Claire Fox (also known as Claire Foster), who you may recognise. She's become a bit of a stalwart these days and pops up on Radio 4's Moral Maze, Question Time and elsewhere with a well-worn line in articulate-sounding libertarian patter.

Claire used to be in the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), which began life as a Trotskyist sect, split from the British Socialist Workers Party in the 1970s. During the '80s they published a magazine called *Living Marxism*. In the '90s the magazine was rebranded the less ideologically sounding LM, while the RCP had been, officially, dissolved, and the group as such was downplayed. LM was forced to liquidate when they famously lost out over claims that ITN staged a refugee camp in Bosnia to look like a concentration camp ('The Picture that Fooled the World'). And in 2000 or so they resurfaced as the *Institute of Ideas* and *Spiked-online* — a website that picks up where they left off — and a dozen or so other fronts. They are all part of what's been dubbed the LM Network, a maze of political activists who have been extraordinarily successful in infiltrating key cultural and political positions in the last few years; mediums for the propagation of a crude modernist libertarianism.

The Left used to be at the forefront of change, technology, progress, LM Network argue, and so they churn out a treadmill of pro forma ideas: [campaigning] "for example, on gun control (it is a misconceived attack on human liberty), child pornography (legal restraint is simply a Trojan horse for the wider censorship of the Internet), alcohol (its dangers have been exaggerated by a new breed of "puritan"), the British National Party (it's unfair to associate it with the murder of Stephen Lawrence; its activities and publications should not be restricted), the Anti-Nazi League (it is undemocratic and irrelevant), tribal people (celebrating their lives offends humanity's potential to better itself; the Yanomami

Indians are not to be envied but pitied), animal rights (they don't have any), and global warming (it's a good thing)."²

They have been the subject of ongoing rumours about who financially backs them, not least after providing platforms for writers from the corporate think-tanks the *Institute for Economic Affairs* and the *Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise*. This is their territory of the revolutionary today, not the regressive disorganised fools of the anarchist anti-capitalist movement. To be a true revolutionary today you have to be, well, a Thatcherite — as one contributor to an online debate about the LM Network put it:

"I saw Claire Fox of the 'Institute for Ideas' on Politics Today (Andrew Neil's programme) I think it's called, on Wednesday complaining about the amount of 'regulation' inflicted on British business by the government — on the same day that trade unionists and fellow campaigners were holding events to mark Workers Memorial Day in memory of those people killed serving 'British business'.³

Frank Furedi

LM's drastic swing to the right mirrored the lessons being handed down by the ideological "Godfather" of the RCP / LM Network and star of Channel Four's anti-green series *Against Nature*⁴, the sociologist Frank Furedi, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent at Canterbury.⁵

Perhaps the high point of LM's media intervention, the three hour, prime time series directed by Martin Durkin⁶, targeted environmentalists presenting them as 'the new enemy of science' and as comparable to the Nazis⁷ — they were responsible, the series argued, for the deprivation and death of millions in the Third World — and for which *Channel Four* had to broadcast a prime-time apology.

Furedi has written for the *Centre for Policy Studies* (founded by those well known communists Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher) and at one point contacted the big supermarket chains, offering, for £7,500, to educate their customers "about complex scientific issues".⁸ The transmogrification was complete, from so-called 'revolutionaries' to a corporate libertarianism which can be read propping-up Monsanto in the pages of *The Wall Street Journal*.⁹

Entryism

While intellectually the Network was singing from the same hymn sheet as the extreme-right, it drew on tactics from the Trotskyist-left, such as "entryism" — infiltrating an organisation to influence its direction. A decade ago the Network initiated a new style of entryism — overnight its members were sharp-suited and organising seminars, hanging out at the ICA.¹⁰ Rather than political parties, the aim was and is to infiltrate think-tanks, media groups, civil society, and they have been remarkably successful — such as LM's former editor Mick Hume having a regular column for *The Times*.

There have been other remarkable successes, and we're not just talking about ex-lefties doing all right in the media:

Juliet Tizzard is another from the LM Network who works for the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), the

government body which, amongst other things, licenses and monitors all human embryo research conducted in the UK. Then there's Emily Jackson who is a member of the HFEA committee itself. She co-authors with Dr Ellie Lee on abortion rights and is part of ProChoice Forum network.¹¹ Both Lee and the ProChoice Forum are closely associated with Frank Furedi, Tizzard, Progress Educational Trust¹² *et al*. At a conference at Furedi's University, Jackson is down as publicly endorsing human reproductive cloning.¹³

As George Monbiot wrote in a letter to the *Times Higher Education Supplement*:

"Former RCP members control much of the formal infrastructure of public communication used by the science and medical establishment. They hold key positions in Sense About Science, the Science Media Centre, the Genetic Interest Group, the Progress Educational Trust, Genepool and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. They have used these positions to promote the interests of pharmaceutical and biotech companies and to dismiss the concerns of the public and non-governmental organisations.

Given that the RCP was a tiny splinter of a Trotskyist subgroup, with just a handful of disciples, given that most of the people who have taken these posts do not have a background in science, and given that the movement has a long history of entryism, its former members' colonisation of these bodies is unlikely to have happened by chance."¹⁴

The Network, grounded in an academic ideological framework provided by Furedi, use the media and various self-created outlets to lambast the 'precautionary principle'. Environmentalism, sustainable development and legal regulation are attacked as holding back humanity and positive change. New technologies, especially biotechnology, and massive industrial development are eulogised.

As one researcher from Lobbywatch — a group that "helps track deceptive PR involving lobbyists, PR firms, front groups, political networks and industry-friendly scientists" — has put it: "The LM network opposes all restrictions on business, science and technology, especially biotechnology."¹⁵

Here is a brief list of some of their front organisations, all of which appear to share the same political outlook, many the same personnel, often the same address and funders:

Africa Direct: denies the genocide in Rwanda

Audacity: argues against any restraints on development, and opposes sustainability

Sense About Science: run by Claire's sister Fiona Fox (or Foster), it supports all forms of biotechnology

Families for Freedom: the risks to children are grossly exaggerated

Feminists for Justice: there should be no laws on date rape

Internet Freedom: no restrictions on paedophilia, race hate etc.¹⁶

Global Futures: a publisher, but only of one author — the RCP's chief theoretician, the sociologist Frank Furedi (aka Frank Richards)

Spiked: Dolan Cummings' online site of more 'controversial views'

WORLDwrite: anti-green gap years and school exchange¹⁷



Lamponing the Regency

The Edinburgh Festival is hardly the place to start espousing censorship. I would defend the right for people to hold views I disagree with; to be as ‘offensive’ as they like. The LM Network certainly hold a predictable stable of offensive right-wing views on just about everything. My argument is for transparency and openness. The Network present themselves as being beyond politics — and are naively treated by media establishments as such — all the while backing big business and operating covertly through the media to influence opinion.

Lobbywatch has been following the LM Network’s ways of working:

“The construction of the events follows a set pattern. Well-known figures, who will help to draw in audiences, are invited to take part in events designed to promote the LM agenda. Invitations to speakers are sometimes made via third parties. The news broadcaster Jon Snow withdrew from an event to which he had been invited by the Royal Society of Arts after realising the lol’s involvement. Snow felt there was a lack of transparency.”¹⁸

The panel put together for the Festival by Fox (or Foster, or whatever her name is) included her favourite panellist, friend and colleague from the *Institute of Ideas*, Dolan Cummings. Cummings is the “research and editorial director” for the Institute, but also pops up at their other outlet, *Spiked online*. Cummings is another partially reconstructed Stalinist-libertarian sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry, who has a nice line in sectarianism.

It’s ironic that Fox says on her own website that she “established [the *Institute of Ideas*] to create a public space where ideas can be contested without constraint” then packs debates with placemen and stooges.

When asked about the group’s involvement in the book festival, Director Catherine Lockerbie responded:

“Claire Fox is a leading media figure taking part regularly in e.g. The Moral Maze and much in demand for press and broadcasting. The Institute of Ideas has worked with the British Museum, the Tate, the Hay festival, the Cheltenham festival, education authorities throughout England and Scotland (in a major schools debating competition, much praised by professionals) and many other leading arms of the establishment. The Edinburgh International Book Festival is a free and open forum for discussion of all kinds of ideas. We do not practise censorship. We uphold freedom of speech.”

And so you should, but the question remains, do the organisers or the paying public know the context this ‘freedom of speech’ takes place in?

The Art of Government

It would be easy to dismiss the LM Network as a peripheral group who operate at a level that is both abstract and removed, but a quick look at just how successful they have been in embedding themselves into key institutions and bodies is telling. Lockerbie’s own response to our queries for this article is also revealing. Fox appears on the Moral Maze — the apogee of British broadcast intellectualism — ergo she cannot be questioned.

And their methods are not as odd as first appears. In their previous incarnation as the

RCP they were vanguardist and deliberately controversial (a veteran of the Miner’s Strike remembers being at a public meeting where they argued for the Miners to be armed). This vanguardism remains — but the agent of change is no longer the industrial working class but the professional media class.

LM Network’s approach, and a more than coy lack of openness about funding, has led to constant speculation down the years as to the mysterious backers of these eclectically libertarian hucksters. It remains a mystery, until a researcher strikes lucky and a biotech equivalent of ‘Moscow Gold’ is unveiled.

Others point out that this is just Frank Furedi’s team, that Fox, Hume and Cummings are minions to his intellectual mission, and that the relationship of leader-worship pushes them nearer the crypto-fascist wing than the wired-post-communist one. The perhaps more generous analysis is that they have been sent to discredit the left in Britain at a time when the anti-capitalist movement gathers strength and intellectual credibility. This analysis argues that they have been doing such for the last twenty years.

On a purely intellectual level, theirs is the defence of a ‘Long Enlightenment’ (Furedi strongly defends the humanist subject, industrial progress, the commitment to absolute standards of judgement, etc.) and this leads them into the same camp as the French, New Right theorist Alain de Benoist’s theory of a heroic Enlightenment, where the priority of the subject is all and the struggle of self-determination and respect for ‘European’ values is central.

Other companions at this end of the lounge are such fellow travellers as Roger Scruton — oddly often posed as the *right* to Claire Fox’s *left* on the Moral Maze. Reviewing Furedi’s ‘Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone?’ (to which one is tempted to reply probably to act as apologists for the biotech industry) he writes:

“For Furedi the growing contempt for objective truth and transmissible knowledge is the sign of a deeper malaise within society — a loss of trust in rational thought and a flight towards “social inclusion”, where this means, in effect, mob rule. The philistinism of educational theory, the take-over of the humanities by the “postmodern” charlatans, the loss of respect for science, and the growing tendency to put “relevance” at the heart of the curriculum — all these are signs, for Furedi, of a fundamental repudiation of knowledge. And this explains the vanishing of the intellectuals.”¹⁹

Well it’s not a bad summation of Furedi’s slightly weird set of straightjacket, push-button ‘theories’, though of course they become increasingly tendentious as his coterie straddles the curriculum, the educational theory, the humanities, etc. They say you’re known by the company you keep and Scruton’s lavish reviews make the LM Network known as a dangerous right-wing group. Scruton goes on to argue that Furedi is not really an intellectual just a “genuinely educated (and transparently conservative) man.” Intellectuals you see, “as we know from the cases of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Sartre, Pol Pot and a thousand more...are dangerous.”²⁰ I’m not sure I’d have thrown poor old Jean Paul Sartre in with Pol Pot, but there you go.

Whatever their ideological backdrop, it is disingenuous for them to present themselves as

beyond left and right and woefully naïve of the book festival organisers and key political and media outlets to invite them to run the show whilst ignoring their clear political agenda. The LM/RCP Network — perhaps only championed by our own neo-cons — are the arch entryists of our era. So if the debate seemed oddly familiar at the Book Festival this year, at least you know why.

Notes

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12. www.gmwatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=160
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